Flathead National Forest Plan Revision Stakeholder Collaboration Process Feedback

November 13, 2013

On November 13, 2013, Connie Lewis, Meridian Institute and Joe Krueger, Flathead National Forest (FNF) requested input from a few stakeholders regarding possible refinements to the collaboration process plan and schedule in the wake of the government shutdown, as well as detail for the upcoming stakeholder orientation meeting. For a list of participants, see Appendix A. If you have additional feedback regarding the process, please contact Rianne BeCraft (rbecraft@merid.org).

Proposed Process

Joe Krueger reviewed the draft process plan for the collaborative process of the FNF plan revision. (See Appendix B). The overall process plan framework remains unchanged since the process meeting in October. However, since then the FNF has made good progress in their work with the 2006 proposed forest plan, to pull out the material that is most relevant to the collaboration and to incorporate input from the assessment. This modified version of the 2006 plan will provide the topical working groups with a solid starting point for their discussions about desired conditions and objectives, as they apply to each topic area. The currently proposed topical groups are:

- Terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, threatened and endangered species, species of conservation concern/species of public interest, vegetation management, disturbances (invasive species, fire, insects and disease, etc.), and forest products
- Recreation, access, and scenery
- Recommended and existing wilderness, WSR, and special designations (IRA, RNA, experimental forests, etc.)

These encompass the same topics as discussed during the process workshop, however possibly combined into three rather than four groups, for efficiency purposes. An additional variance from the original process proposal is to transition from topical work groups to geographically focused groups that would apply recommendations from the topical groups to geographic areas, tentatively categorized as follows:

- Hungry Horse, and Middle and South Forks
- North Fork
- Salish
- Swan

Feedback

The stakeholders on the call provided the following feedback:

Sideboards and Background Information

- Keep the conversation focused and productive by explaining sideboards early in the process, being explicit about sections of the existing plan that will remain unchanged versus the areas where feedback is desirable, and providing a "roadmap" at the outset to guide their discussions.
- Having the Modified 2006 Plan as a starting point will be helpful, particularly if each workgroup is given the specific sections of the Plan that pertain to their topic.
- Keep the focus at the 30,000 foot Forest Plan level, while recognizing that some stakeholders may come hoping to talk about specific projects.
- Provide clarity about how the collaboration differs from, and supplements, the NEPA process.

Working Groups in General

- Understand that participation in working groups will need to be flexible. In some instances the group sizes may be larger at the onset, with participation decreasing over time.
- Also, recognize that that some stakeholders who are already significantly involved in other forest plan revision processes (i.e., the Kootenai) may not have much bandwidth to engage on the FNF revision process at this time.

Topical Working Groups

- Recognize that wildlife is likely to come up in all of the topical working groups.
- Create shorthand topical working group names to more clearly differentiate the focus of each group.

Geographic Areas

- Recognize that geographic area working groups may need to be adjusted based on outcomes of topical working groups.
- Combining the Hungry Horse area with the Middle and South Fork area may be too large of a focus for one geographic group.

Meetings

- The term 'plenary' is confusing – either find a different term or explain it better.
- Try to ensure that stakeholders have the opportunity to review background materials in advance of meetings.
- Each meeting will need clear goals and expectations so all participants understand what is going to be accomplished.
- A schedule of meeting dates needs to be provided as early as possible.

General Feedback

- Not everyone is familiar with abbreviations and acronyms – spell them out.
- Provide multiple avenues for participation, and let stakeholders know how they can be involved.

Appendix A: Call Participant List

Flathead National Forest Staff:

Joe Krueger, Forest Plan Revision Team Leader
Stacy Allen, Writer/Editor

Meridian Institute Staff:

Rianne BeCraft, Project Assistant
Connie Lewis, Senior Partner
Diana Portner, Mediator and Program Associate

Stakeholders:

Bill Baum
Anne Dahl
Carol Daly
Robbie Holman
Al Koss
Paul McKenzie

Appendix B: Process Overview

Provided by Flathead National Forest, Draft, November 12, 2013

Flathead National Forest Proposed Land Management Plan

MODIFIED 2006 VERSION FOR USE IN COLLABORATION

Preface

This version of the proposed Land Management Plan includes: 1) changes based upon public comment received on the 2006 proposed plan, and 2) recent comments made by the planning team that address either management direction given the 2012 planning rule requirements or edits that will occur based on new information. The comments within this document were based on a quick review by the planning team and do not reflect all the changes that will need to be made to comply with the new rule. This document only includes management direction for the revision topics that the collaborative group will focus on. This document is not considered final; its use is as a reference and starting point for discussion by the collaborative groups. The Forest Supervisor and the planning team will be looking at all options for management direction that will meet the 2012 planning rule requirements. The expectation for the use of this document is as a reference and starting point for discussion.

The goal of the collaborative effort (December 2013 to June 1014) is to provide the Flathead National Forest with diverse input and identify areas of agreement on what the proposed plan should include as management direction to begin the formal scoping process. The Forest intends to initiate scoping with a draft proposed plan in September 2014.

The process for the next 6 months is designed to focus first on the Forest-wide desired condition and objectives, look for areas of agreement, and recommend other desired condition statements and/or objectives for the planning team to consider. For objectives, it may be difficult to provide a specific number or range of numbers to consider at this time. Objectives should help move towards a desired condition. Objectives should be concise, measurable, and time-specific so that they describe the focus of management in the plan within the plan period (next 10-15 years). Objectives should be based on reasonably foreseeable budgets.

After developing recommendations on forest-wide desired conditions and objectives, the collaborative groups will then focus their attention on reviewing and developing recommendations for the desired conditions within the 6 geographic areas (GAs) (e.g. what should the access and travel management desired conditions look like for the Swan Valley GA?) Once recommendations for desired conditions in the GAs are made, the focus will turn to mapping the management areas (MAs) within respective GA's. The MAs that will be used for this exercise are the same as those in the 2006 plan with the addition of a MA 4.1a and 4.1b. It is recommended that the collaborative groups use these MAs (see page X of this document) as a starting point, but if the groups feel strongly that different MA's are needed to meet desired conditions and objectives then you are welcome to suggest changes.

Based on the process outlined above, it is expected that a final report will be developed that identifies areas of agreement and areas on which new management direction is being proposed. The Forest will take the final collaborative report in consideration from June through August 2014 as they develop the draft proposed plan to initiate scoping and the formal NEPA process.

The collaborative will have 3 working groups focused on the following revision topics:

1. Terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, TES, species of conservation concern/species of public interest; vegetation management, disturbances (invasive species, fire, insects and disease, etc.), forest products;
2. Recreation, access, scenery;
3. Recommended and existing wilderness, WSR, special designations (IRA, RNA, experimental forests, etc.).

The collaborative process and meeting schedule (January-June)

Topical Working Groups

Initially the 3 topical working groups will work on forest-wide desired conditions and objectives. There will be a plenary session in January with the entire group meeting initially and then break-out into topical working groups. A follow-up by topic will be facilitated in conference calls. The conference calls will be scheduled so that those interested in multiple topics will be given the opportunity to participate accordingly. In March the topical working groups will work on defining desired conditions for the geographic areas.

Geographic Area Working Groups

In April all groups will come together in a plenary sessions to report on their recommendations and will then break out into GA groups for purpose of refining lines on maps.

Break topical groups into GA discussions in April and May:

- Hungry Horse and Middle and South Forks
- North Fork
- Salish
- Swan

Appendix C: Proposed Process Schedule

Provided by Meridian Institute, Draft, November 12, 2013

	December	January	February	March	April	May	June
Stakeholder Meetings	Orientation Meeting	Plenary (& maybe calls depending on timing)	Topical Group Calls & Meetings	Plenary (& maybe calls)	Geographic Group Calls & meets	Plenary	
Topic	Planning & Process orientation Intro topics & convene topic groups	Forest–wide conditions & objectives	Finalize topic groups' forest-wide conditions & objectives groups recommendations Begin applying topic recommendation to MAs	Conclude forest-wide conditions & objectives recommendations in plenary. Apply to geographic areas Convene geographic groups	Apply MA recommendations within geographic areas	Finalize all recommendations	
Format		Plenary: 4:00-6:15 concurrent topic groups (3) 6:30-8:30 plenary reports from groups & discussion 8:30-9:00 topic groups regroup & ID next steps	1 two-hr call @ to finalize each group's conditions & objectives recommendations 1 four-hr meet: each topical group (different times, same week) apply conditions &	Plenary: 4-7:00 Present & discuss topic & topic MA recommendations in plenary. 7-9 Convene geographic area groups. Begin applying MA recommendations from all topic	1 four-hr meet of each geographic group about MAs in their geographic area 1 two-hr call @ to finalize MA recommendations	Present & discuss all geographic MA recommendations in plenary Other work to finalize input	

			objectives recommendations to geographic areas	groups to their geographic areas			
Homework	Stakeholders review modified 06 plan & prep ideas about conditions & objectives	Meridian produce draft recommendations for each group Stakeholders review & comment on draft Meridian synthesize comments	Meridian finalize recommendations docs for each group Meridian produce draft geog. area concept reports Stakeholders review & comment on drafts prior to plenary	Meridian summarize each group's work for discussion at next geographic group meetings	After the meeting, Meridian document & distribute draft geographic group recommendations prior to the call. After the call Meridian finalize changes for group review & produce draft for plenary.	Meridian produce final report	
Other Activities	Interagency Meeting		Interagency Meeting & Mid-Process Report		Interagency Meeting		Final Report